

Artists, entrepreneurs, community workers honored at Sikh Heritage Awards Gala

PHOTOS: ASHOK OJHA



Left: Indian art promoter Donald Rubin expresses his thanks on receiving the Sikh Heritage Award as Sikh Art and Film Foundation president Teji Bindra (left) and Shelley Rubin (extreme right) look on; Right: Entrepreneur Analjit Singh (right) receives the Sikh Heritage Award for leadership.

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New York

DISTINGUISHED filmmakers, artists, entrepreneurs and social workers were honored at a glittering event, Sikh Heritage Awards Gala, held in New York's financial district. It marked the conclusion of a two-day art and film festival that showcased a variety of films and paintings at Asia Society, highlighting some of the lesser known episodes of Sikh history and culture.

Well known promoter of Indian art and CEO of Rubin Museum of Art, Donald Rubin and his wife Shelley were honored with 2009 Heritage Award for their vision to promote art, especially Sikh art. The Rubins were instrumental in presenting an exhibition on early Sikh art and devotion, *I See No Stranger*. Prior to building the museum Shelly and Donald Rubin started a foundation with the aim of supporting innovative efforts to transform society's institutions and empowering individuals to develop their potential. The couple have been collecting Himalayan art for more than 30 years.

Analjit Singh, chairman and CEO of Max India, a multi-business corporation focused on people and service oriented businesses, was honored with 2009 Heritage Award for Leadership. A leading businessman, Singh helped enhance India's academic excellence.

Sardar Ujagar Singh, director, Camp Chardi Kala, was honored for his outstanding community service. Motivated by a desire to create better understanding about the Sikh value among the younger generation and to help unite his community, Singh along with a handful of volunteers joined an initiative to organize Gurmat camps that led to the formation of annual summer camps for Sikh children in 1976. In 1980 he took over as the director of Camp Chardi Kala, named for the spirit it brings to the youth.

Tejinder Singh Bindra, president of Sikh Art & Film Foundation, that organized the event, spoke in his welcome speech about the commitment of his organization in projecting an elevated understanding of Sikh art and heritage. He said that he was paying rich tributes to the leadership and vision of

the individuals by honoring them. Bindra pointed out that the foundation successfully developed awareness about the community and contributed to the cultural diversity in the state of New York. As a result Governor David Paterson declared October 3-10 as Sikh Heritage Week.

Three young filmmakers received rousing acclaim when their films were declared winners at the Sikh Art and Film Festival Gala night. Announcing the award in the short film category, Prabhu Dayal, Consul General of India in New York declared *Unravelling* as the winner. In the documentary category, *A Warrior's Religion* won the best documentary award. A total of six films competed in short film category while four competed in the documentary category. According to Dr. Amritpal S. Johar, chair-Film Festival, the documentary films covered a wide range of topics including the history of turban and its perception in the post 9/11 world and gang violence by the second generation of South Asians in Van-



The Twin Singh Sisters speak to PTC Punjabi TV

cover in Canada. They also took an upbeat look at bhangra, a traditional dance form that is fast gaining popularity around the world.

Singh said that six short films covered troubling issues, such as the French ban on Sikh turbans in schools and the tough lives of taxi drivers in New York City. He mentioned that the awards amounted to a total of \$15,000. The panel of judges included Dr. Balbir S. Bhogal, Associate Professor of Religion at Hofstra University, New York, Aseem Chhabra, a freelance writer, Kamal Dandona, producer, Sabrina Dhawan, film writer and director, Dr. Narinder Singh Kapany, philanthropist, Vicky Mabrey, TV journalist and Dr. Sarab S. Neelam, director.

Accepting the award, Kuldip Powar, director of *Unravelling* said that he felt honored to receive the award. The UK-based filmmaker has worked on numerous projects related with study of South Asian Diaspora. *Unravelling* explored the theme of war and remembrance, loss and exclusion and

colonial legacy in contemporary Britain. Mani Amar, director of *A Warrior's Religion* was motivated by troubling violence in Vancouver that took the lives of 100 South Asian males in 19 years. He interviewed community leaders and used facts and figures to bring awareness about the misconceptions about the South Asian culture.

Live auction of paintings by noted artist Arpana Caur was another highlight of the evening. Donald Rubin bought a painting by Arpana Caur for \$15,000. The contemplative posture in the painting is typical of the Nanak depicted in so many old Sikh miniatures. *My Earth is Green* is Caur's environmental work. It refers to nature in various forms. Sikh religious scripture, *Granth Sahib*, mentions nature and its relation with the Almighty in many ways. The gurus and saints loved nature and believed that all seasons, rivers, trees, and breezes are part of the Almighty's great canvas.

Also displayed for auction were ceremonial glass *kirpan*, metal *kirpan*, Guru Nanak's carvings, Guru Govind carvings and Golden Temple carvings. Companies like Jet Airways and Jumeirah Resort, Dubai offered fabulous prizes for those who bought the paintings. The festival was inaugurated on September 18 at Asia Society with screenings of selected feature films *My Mother India* by Safina Uberoi, *Flying Sikhs* by Navdeep Kandola and *Nineteen Eighty-Four and the Via Dolorosa Project* by the Singh Twin sisters. It concluded with the gala dinner where artistes, entrepreneurs and community leaders were honored for their contributions to create awareness in society.

"We are committed to the promote Sikh art and culture in America so that misconceptions about our community are erased," said Teji Bindra, founder and president of the foundation. Celebrated filmmaker Mira Nair, who couldn't attend the gala dinner, sent her greetings via video. Entertainers DJ Kulcha and DJ Munks created an atmosphere of excitement and fun. They were supported by dancing tunes of Rhythm Dhol Bass. Renowned TV personality Dr. Daljeet Dhaliwal was the Mistress of Ceremonies.

NYC Bhangra performed at the inaugural day party at Asia Society.

